

Irving Kristol



Irving Kristol as a senior in high school

Irving Kristol (22 January 1920 – 18 September 2009) was an American columnist, journalist, and writer who was dubbed the “godfather of *neoconservatism*.”

1 Sourced

- It requires strength of character to act upon one’s ideas; it requires no less strength of character to resist being seduced by them.
 - *New Leader*, April 1, 1963.
- Nostalgia is one of the legitimate and certainly one of the most enduring of human emotions; but the politics of nostalgia is at best distracting, at worst pernicious.
 - *New York Times Magazine*, December 20, 1964.

- An intellectual may be defined as a man who speaks with general authority about a subject on which he has no particular competence.
 - *Foreign Affairs*, July 1967.
- Power breeds responsibilities, in international affairs as in domestic -- or even private. To dodge or disclaim these responsibilities is one form of the abuse of power.
 - *New York Times Magazine*, May 12, 1968.
- After all, if you believe that no one was ever corrupted by a book, you also have to believe that no one was ever improved by a book (or a play or a movie). You have to believe, in other words, that all art is morally trivial and that, consequently, all education is morally irrelevant. No one, not even a university professor, really believes that.
 - *New York Times Magazine*, March 28, 1971.
- I have observed over the years that the unanticipated consequences of social action are always more important, and usually less agreeable, than the intended consequences.
 - *On the Democratic Idea in America* (New York, 1972), p. ix.
- The enemy of liberal capitalism today is not so much socialism as nihilism.
 - *The Public Interest*, Spring 1973.
- Senator McGovern is very sincere when he says that he will try to cut the military budget by 30%. And this is to drive a knife in the heart of Israel... Jews don't like big military budgets. But it is now an interest of the Jews to have a large and powerful military establishment in the United States... American Jews who care about the survival of the state of Israel have to say, no, we don't want to cut the military budget, it is important to keep that military budget big, so that we can defend Israel.
 - *Congress Bi-Weekly* (1973), published by the *American Jewish Congress*. Quoted by Philip Weiss in *Mondoweiss* (May 23, 2007).

- What rules the world is idea, because ideas define the way reality is perceived.
 - *Wall Street Journal*, September 11, 1975.
- The liberal paradigm of regulation and license has led to a society where an 18-year-old girl has the right to public fornication in a pornographic movie -- but only if she is paid the minimum wage.
 - *Wall Street Journal*, September 11 1975.
- [Conservatism:] Our revolutionary message ... is that a self-disciplined people can create a political community in which an ordered liberty will promote both economic prosperity and political participation.
 - Essay in *American Spectator Magazine* (1977).
- If you have standards, moral standards, you have to want to make them prevail, and at the very least you have to argue in their favor. Now, show me where libertarians have argued in some comprehensive way for a set of moral standards. ... I don't think morality can be decided on the private level. I think you need public guidance and public support for a moral consensus. The average person has to know instinctively, without thinking too much about it, how he should raise his children.
 - Essay in the *Wall Street Journal* (1978).
- It was a new kind of class war — the people as citizens versus the politicians and their clients in the public sector.
 - *The Question of Liberty in America*
 - About California's 1978 Proposition 13 which limits tax increases without public approval
- Joining a radical movement when one is young is very much like falling in love when one is young. The girl may turn out to be rotten, but the the experience of love is so valuable it can never be entirely undone by the ultimate disenchantment.
 - "Memoirs of a Trotskyist", *New York Times*, January 23, 1979.
- Young people, especially, are looking for religion so desperately that they are inventing new ones. They should not have to invent new ones; the old religions are pretty good.
 - *Capitalism and Socialism: A Theological Inquiry* (American Enterprise Institute Press, 1979).
- A welfare state, properly conceived, can be an integral part of a conservative society.
 - *Reflections of a Neoconservative: Looking Back, Looking Ahead* (1983).
- **[A neoconservative is] a liberal who has been mugged by reality. A neoliberal is a liberal who got mugged by reality but has not pressed charges.**
 - *Reflections of a Neoconservative: Looking Back, Looking Ahead* (1983).
- People need religion. It's a vehicle for a moral tradition. A crucial role. Nothing can take its place.
 - Interview in *Reason Magazine* (1983).
- The trouble with traditional American conservatism is that it lacks a naturally cheerful, optimistic disposition. Not only does it lack one, it regards signs of one as evidence of unsoundness, irresponsibility.
 - *Wall Street Journal*, November 18, 1985.
- **Doing good isn't [that] hard. It's just doing a lot of good that is very hard. If your aims are modest, you can accomplish an awful lot. When your aims become elevated beyond a reasonable level, you not only don't accomplish much, you can cause a great deal of damage.**
 - Interview in the *London Times Higher Education Supplement* (1987).
- The danger facing American Jews today is not that Christians want to persecute them but that Christians want to marry them.
 - Quoted in *Commentary*, January 1994.
- It is ironic to watch the churches, including large sections of my own religion, surrendering to the spirit of modernity at the very moment when modernity itself is undergoing a kind of spiritual collapse....
 - *Neo-Conservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea* (1995), pp. 36-7.
- **The major political event of the twentieth century is the death of socialism.**
 - *Neo-Conservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea* (1995).
- If you care for the quality of life in our American democracy, then you have to be for censorship.

- *Pornography, Obscenity, and the Case for Censorship* (1995).
- There is nothing like a parade to elicit the proper respect for the military from the populace.
 - Quoted in Wilford, H: *The New York Intellectuals: From Vanguard to Institution*, Manchester University Press, 1995.
- There are different kinds of truths for different kinds of people. There are truths appropriate for children; truths that are appropriate for students; truths that are appropriate for educated adults; and truths that are appropriate for highly educated adults, and the notion that there should be one set of truths available to everyone is a modern democratic fallacy. It doesn't work.
 - Quoted in "Origin of the Specious", *Reason Magazine* (July 1997).

1.1 *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (1978)

- **Democracy does not guarantee equality of conditions — it only guarantees equality of opportunity.**
- Today there is a new class hostile to business in general, and especially to large corporations. As a group, you find them mainly in the very large and growing public sector and in the media. They share a disinterest in personal wealth, a dislike for the free-market economy, and a conviction that society may best be improved through greater governmental participation in the country's economic life. They are the media. They are the educational system. Their dislike for the free-market economy originates in their inability to exercise much influence over it so as to produce change. In its place they would prefer a system in which there is a very large political component. This is because the new class has a great deal of influence in politics. Thus, through politics, they can exercise a direct and immediate influence on the shape of our society and the direction of national affairs.
- A liberal is one who says that it's all right for an 18-year-old girl to perform in a pornographic movie as long as she gets paid the minimum wage.
- Neo-conservatives are unlike old conservatives because they are utilitarians, not moralists, and because their aim is the prosperity of post-industrial society, not the recovery of a golden age.

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